



Multiple Flexible Pathways as a Mechanism to Increase Learning and Skill Development for Out-of-School Children and Adolescents

Good Practice Note 4: Integrating Transferable Skills into the Multiple and Flexible Pathways' Curricula

UNICEF Analytical Framework: Multiple and Flexible Pathways

The [Secondary Education Guidance: Multiple and Flexible Pathways](#) identifies three different modalities of Multiple and Flexible Pathways:



Accelerated **education programmes** that target **out-of-school children and adolescents** and over-aged adolescents and youth who did not complete their education or are lagging several years behind their peers.



Short-term alternative education programmes (e.g., catch-up, bridging, reintegration programmes) and second chance education targeting those who never attended schools.



Alternative programmes that use **technology in remote rural communities** without access to schools.



The specific configuration of these modalities is highly diverse, as they need to be responsive to local contexts. While the only global-level UNICEF guidance on Multiple and Flexible Pathways is on secondary education, UNICEF work in this area does include initiatives that offer alternative learning opportunities to pre-primary, primary, and secondary school-aged out-of-school children.

Introduction

Multiple and flexible pathways to learning are defined as skills development alternatives for children and adolescents who dropped out of school or have never enrolled, usually operating in non-formal educational settings.¹ Generally, these alternative learning programmes aim to be responsive to the diverse needs of targeted populations and the realities of local communities, including the needs of business and productive sectors. In many cases, these programmes also seek to increase education opportunities for learners by removing barriers to learning when the traditional education system has failed them. They also aim to capitalize on local resources, expand educational services and entrepreneurial training, and help learners develop the knowledge and skills needed to return to formal schooling and/or to transition to work.

This document is one in a series of four interrelated and complementary notes featuring *good practices for designing and implementing* multiple and flexible pathways to learning. The topics presented in the good practices notes include:

1. accreditation of programmes and conferring of recognized credentials on learners (sometimes referred to as credentialization);
2. embracing local communities as authentic partners;
3. integrating transferable skills into multiple and flexible pathways to learning curricula; and
4. alignment with local and national levels stakeholders for increasing enrolment.

These good practice notes are produced as part of the "Evaluation of UNICEF Contributions to the Reduction of Out-of-School Children and Improving Access to Multiple and Flexible Pathways," which took place between September 2023 and May 2024. Evidence presented in this document comes from the data gathered and analysed for that evaluation.² Analyses were guided by the [2020 Secondary Education Guidance: Multiple and Flexible Pathways](#).

UNICEF Good Practice: Integrating Transferable Skills into the Multiple and flexible pathways to learning curricula

Transferable skills³ are essential indicators of education and work success. These skills are personal characteristics and attitudes that facilitate social interactions and work efficiency and can be relevant in different contexts and situations. They can improve the learner's ability to collaborate, face challenges, communicate effectively and engage in fruitful interpersonal relations. Employers often consider transferable skills as necessary as basic content knowledge (e.g., reading, writing and mathematics). Given the relevance of transferable skills for future education and work success, combining training for these skills with academic content in multiple and flexible pathways could improve learners' future opportunities.

1 UNESCO defines non-formal education as "education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider;" the defining characteristic of non-formal education is that "it is an alternative and/or a complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals." A few multiple and flexible pathways supported by UNICEF were part of the formal education sector; however, even those operated in both formal and non-formal settings.

2 Primary data collected included key informant semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with representatives of UNICEF regional and country offices, government institutions (e.g., Ministries of Education), and implementing partners (e.g., local CSOs, universities). Observation and primary collected data were collected from countries visited in-person, including Colombia, Egypt, Guatemala, the Philippines, and Uganda. Secondary data collected included programme documents and data as well as relevant policy documents. For additional methodological, data collection and analytical details, refer to the full evaluation report.

3 Also labelled as socio-emotional skills, social skills, social innovation competencies, life skills, or soft-skills.

Tajikistan: Transferrable Skills to Help Address Challenges Faced by Adolescents

What: The competency-based learning programme, implemented mainly in non-formal settings, emphasizes developing adolescents' transferrable skills

Who: UNICEF Tajikistan and the Ministry of Education and Science

How: UNICEF Tajikistan supports the Ministry of Education and Science with competency-based learning for adolescents. A research study identified significant challenges that adolescents face and 10 core social competencies needed to address them. Challenges included self-awareness of rights and needs; unsafe and illegal work and exploitation; risky and unhealthy behaviours; violence abuse, exploitation, and discrimination; and psychological and mental health suffering. An Adolescent Competency Framework was then developed and used to inform the design of a competency-based learning programme. Cumulatively, the programme reached approximately 30,000 adolescents between 2018 and 2022.

Why: Adolescents in schools and out-of-school fall behind in their acquisition of life skills because schools and alternative learning programmes do not provide competency-based curricula. Many adolescents lack the social skills to realize their full potential and options to transition from school to work or maximize their contributions to their community. Data from 2017 estimated that more than 30 per cent of adolescents were not in school, training or employed, and that almost 90 per cent of them were girls or young women. The competency-based learning programme provided opportunities for adolescents and young people to develop much-needed skills to realize their potential and/or transition to work. The programme also empowered girls to combat restrictive gender norms and conservative social practices.

The Tajikistan case illustrates that out-of-school children and adolescents could benefit not only from acquiring life skills but also from increasing their ability to find jobs and/or start their own business. It also demonstrates that their communities could

benefit from having children and adolescents with higher education levels who put into practice what they have learned and their acquired skills. By doing this, children and adolescents can contribute to the enhancement and growth of their communities.

Tanzania: Bridging the Gap from Life-Skills to Employability

What: Combining life skills with content knowledge and cognitive skills in multiple and flexible pathways to learning facilitates employability

Who: UNICEF Tanzania, the Ministry of Science, Education and Technology, and the Institute of Adult Education

How: With UNICEF's technical and financial support, the Ministry of Science, Education and Technology and the Institute of Adult Education launched the Integrated Programme for Out-of-School Adolescents (IPOSA) in 2019. This programme focuses on adolescents who never attended school and were not proficient in reading, writing, arithmetic and life skills. Since its inception, the programme has developed foundational learning and life skills such as personal empowerment, good citizenship, life planning, positive interpersonal relationships and skills for employability.

Why: UNICEF Tanzania worked with the Ministry of Science, Education and Technology to find a way to move beyond the formal school system to provide life skills and employability training to adolescents – especially those out-of-school. By supporting IPOSA from its inception through its planned expansion on a broader scale, UNICEF assisted in a three-part strategy for skills development, which combined foundational learning, life skills and skills in specific vocational areas (e.g., carpentry). This programme increased the employability of out-of-school adolescents. By linking life skills to 'harder skills' the programme provides adolescent learners with a bridge to employability in the workforce.

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The Tanzania case demonstrates the implementation of an IPOSA program that targeted adolescents with double (or more) disadvantages because they were unfamiliar with formal schools and not proficient in key content areas. This intervention recognizes and acknowledges the different ways in which those

adolescents could benefit from targeted initiatives to acquire foundational basic skills while also learning about social norms and expectations, social interaction practices, relations with authorities and peers, and many other social behaviours and practices.

Guatemala: Socio-Emotional Skills Development in Multiple and Flexible Pathways

What: UNICEF Guatemala and the Center of Education for Development collaborated to develop socio-emotional learning skills among adolescents and youth. This initiative focused on helping students work through trauma and enhance emotional intelligence, which is crucial for their personal and educational growth.

Who: UNICEF Guatemala and the Center of Education for Development

How: . The programme operated in Non-Formal Education Centers (CEEX) and was financially supported by UNICEF across four municipalities: Alta Verapaz, Quiché, Totonicapán, and Huehuetenango. Social-emotional learning became part of the CEEX curricula to equip teachers with skills to recognize trauma, build trust, facilitate discussions on emotional well-being, and conduct relaxation exercises. Parents and local community leaders were also trained to address trauma, thus creating a supportive community network.

Why: A qualitative assessment revealed that many adolescents at CEEXs exhibited disruptive behaviours, often linked to traumatic experiences, including abandonment due to parental migration, violence, and extreme poverty. These behaviours extended to increased alcohol use and diminished interest in academic engagement and attendance. Teaching socio-emotional skills at the CEEXs addressed these issues directly to increase engagement and retention, thereby supporting CEEXs' learners in completing their studies and improving their life prospects.

UNICEF-supported examples of multiple and flexible pathways to learning in Guatemala and Tanzania recognize the importance of transferable skills for learners' future educational opportunities and well-being. These cases show recent trends observed in multiple and flexible pathways where transferable skill development is explicitly

incorporated into their curricula. These programmes motivate learners to develop skills such as self-esteem, bidirectional communication, leadership creativity and innovation, and they also teach participants the relevance of these skills to learning and future well-being.

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